

Regulations for the Elderly and the Widows (1 Timothy 5:1-16)

1. (5:1-2) How to Treat Elders: Here, Paul speaks of “elders” and instructs Timothy not to rebuke them. In this case, “elders” probably does not refer to clergy but to aged men and women. The word used for “rebuke” suggests a violent sharpness. Sometimes, the word even indicates physical violence. Rather, Paul says to “exhort” them to do his best to give them an understanding of God’s word without disrespecting their station. It is appropriate for Paul to talk about how Timothy was to treat the elderly before going to the larger discussion of the widows. There is a natural connection within Jewish law between the two. Respect is due for both in their various social locations (see Lev 19:32).
2. (5:3-16) Guidelines for Caring for Widows
 - a. (vv. 3-4) Respect and care for widows was integral to God’s will as outlined in the Torah (Exod 22:22; Deut 14:29; 16:11). Paul however wants to make sure that since church resources are finite that those who are taken in or cared for by the church have exhausted their resources. They should not be taken in by the church if they have support elsewhere. This command is also part of the commandment to honor father and mother, which necessitates financial support (Exod 20:12; Matt 15:4-9).
 - b. (vv. 5-10) Paul stipulates that the widow be “true” or genuine in other ways beyond financial support as well. She should be committed to God. She should be no less than 60 years old and not have had more than one husband. The command about her husband assures that she truly has no other support. She must prove her faithfulness to the Lord’s works as well. As someone who receives support, she must also demonstrate her willingness to be gracious in service.
 - c. (vv. 6-16) Paul excludes younger widows, not because they are more inclined to sinful behavior. But he must be speaking of a specific situation he has seen within the congregation where younger women who have lost their commitment to Christ have gotten remarried and begin to become problematic for church life. Paul suggests that the younger widows, who have fidelity towards God (v. 14), should most certainly get married and care for their families.